

changing food practices - the role of life events for sustainable consumption

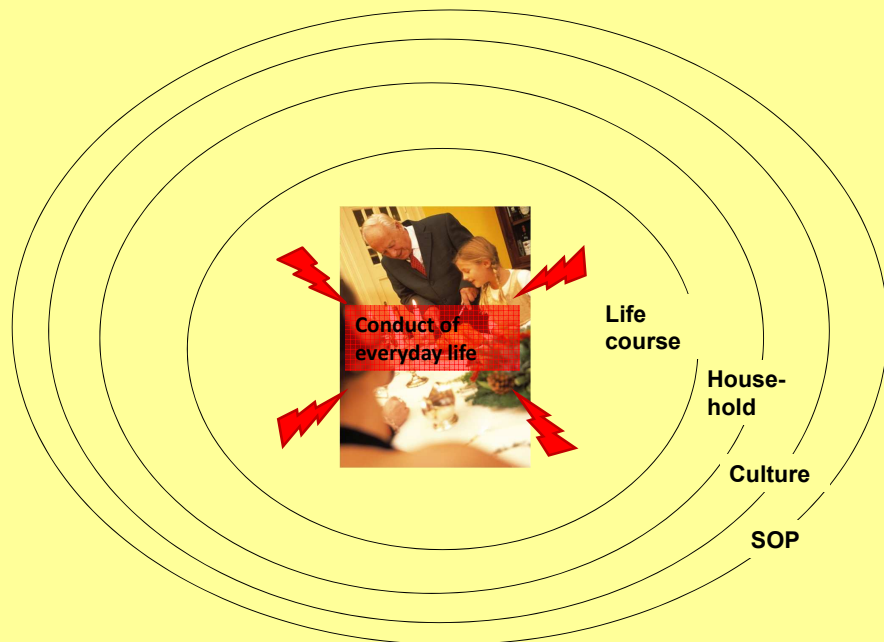
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The matter of sustainable consumption

- Sustainable consumption a key issue of sustainable development (Ropke 1999)
- Great challenge: unsustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles (Durning 1992; Stern 1992, European Environment Agency 2005; United Nations 2002 Sitarz 1994); many attempts to tackle it (OECD 2008)
- In the food areas it is emphasized to support low meat consumption and high percentage of organic products (Carlsson-Kanyama 1998; Carlsson-Kanyama et al. 2003; Pretty et al. 2005)

Starting points for interventions

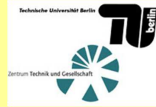
- Systems of provision
- Knowledge, attitudes, normative expectations
- Life course transitions
 - Parents tend to buy more sustainable products (Herde 2007)
 - Interest in healthy nutrition increases, but child nutrition is central (Brunner et al. 2006)
 - Mothers neglect own eating habits after childbirth and tend to eat less structured and healthy (Aschemann-Witzel 2010)



Example 'Life events as windows of opportunity for change towards sustainable consumption patterns'

- March 2008 to May 2011

- Cooperation project



- Funded by



Combination of
sociological and
psychological knowledge

Integration of
quantitative and
qualitative results

background idea

challenge

Everyday consumption is mostly part of routines that have evolved over a period of time and work fairly well in the context of everyday demands, resources and structural conditions. They are an integral and important part of everyday life and therefore difficult to change by information alone.

approach

Routines change during life course transitions opening 'windows of opportunity' for change towards sustainable consumption patterns. If people are approached in this phase they are more open for encouragement to adopt sustainable consumption patterns.

target groups and behaviours

- relocation, childbirth, 'stable conditions'
- nutrition:
 - less meat consumption
 - less consumption of convenience product/ more homemaking of food
 - increased consumption of organic products
 - increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables

quantitative inquiry

• main hypotheses

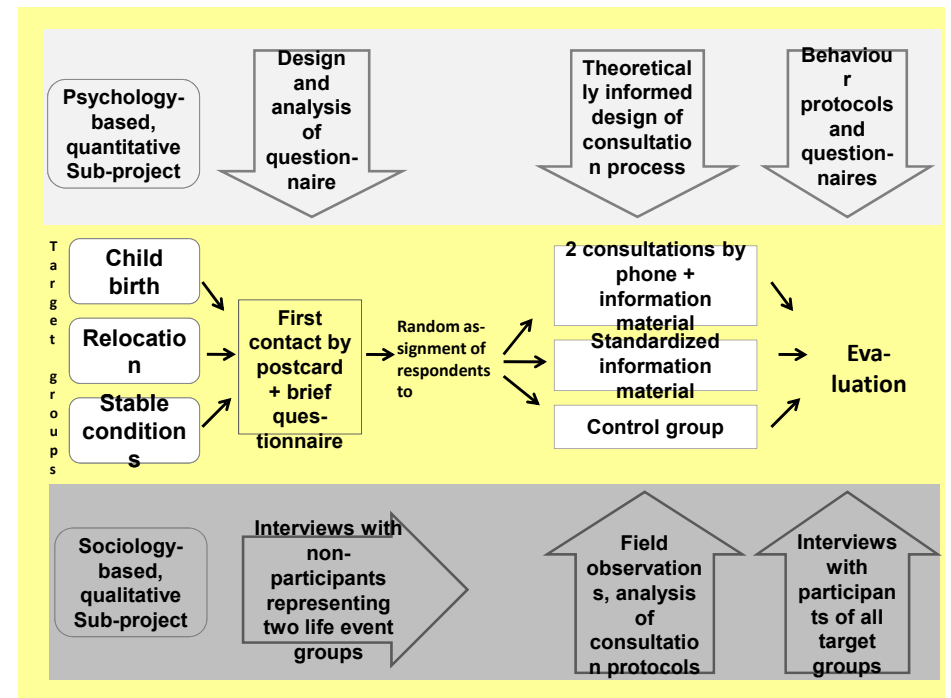
- ... life events change consumption patterns, therefore people after life events show different patterns than people in stable situations.
- ... a personal consultation is more effective than an information campaign in changing consumption habits.
- ... people after life events are more susceptible to the consultation campaign.

• quasi-experimental control-group design

- ... Comparing three target groups and three experimental conditions
- ... 1031 participants (396 control group, 383 standardized information package, 252 consultation) who completed evaluation; 73% female; mean age 39.5; mean household size 2.7 persons; 53% highest German school degree, 8% an academic degree; 67% full or part-time employed, 12% still in education, 12% retired, 4% unemployed, 5% homemakers)

qualitative inquiry

- main questions
 - ... how and why everyday consumption patterns in nutrition, mobility and energy use change during life events change
 - ... the 'windows' for sustainable consumption.
 - ... life event specific effects of a consultation campaign promoting sustainable consumption.
- qualitative problem-focused interviews
 - ... with 28 participants of the campaign and 18 non-participants (appr. 1.5 hours complemented by observation and 'mapping' method)
 - ... aged between 19 and 89 (Mean 43.3), 72% were female, 61% had an academic background (61%); 16 on parental leave, 3 unemployed, 3 retired, 3 studying, rest worked on a self-employed or employed basis



quantitative results

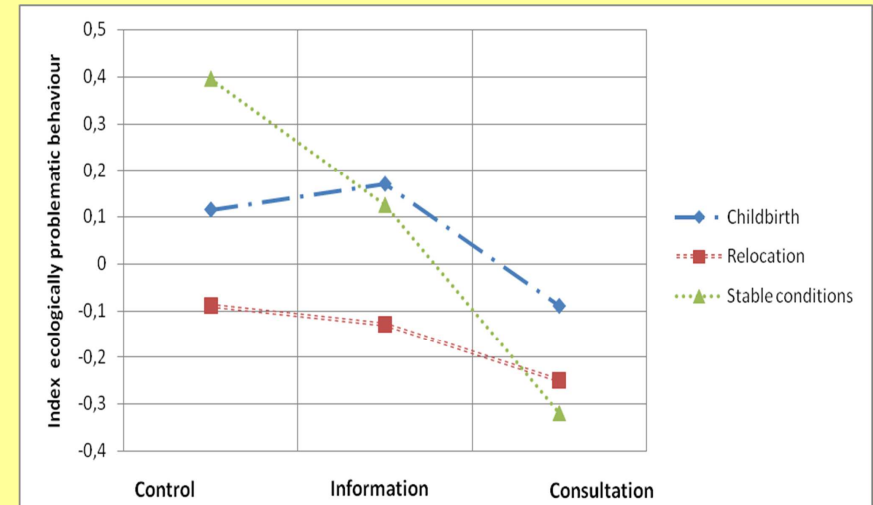
- response rate
- differences in consumption behaviours
- impact of the intervention

		Childbirth	Relocation	Stable conditions	Total
Transport	Contacted	3013	4913	5095	13.021
	Response	429	355	317	1.101
	%	14%	7%	6%	8%
Energy	Contacted	2984	4556	4470	12.010
	Response	320	244	235	799
	%	11%	5%	5%	7%
Nutrition	Contacted	3034	4730	4834	12.598
	Response	338	251	204	793
	%	11%	5%	4%	6%
Total	Contacted	9.031	14.199	14.399	37.629
	Response	1.087	850	756	2.693
	%	12%	6%	5%	7%

quantitative results

- people after relocation buy more convenience and processed food than parents.
- people after life events are not more susceptible to the campaign (= do not significantly change the target behaviours)

group comparison with overall index



qualitative results

- descriptive results/ observations
- process of change
- multiple meanings of consumption/ consumption-relevant social practices
- the role of sustainability
- experiences and perceptions in context of the campaign

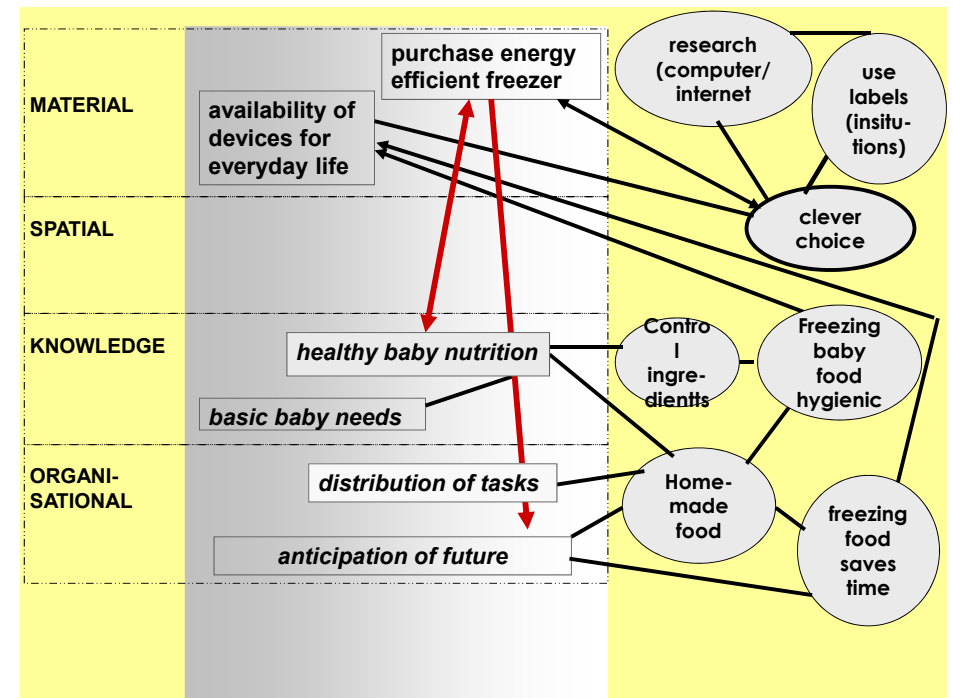
descriptive results

- almost all parents reported to buy organic products, at least for the baby
- in many cases everyday nutrition was described as more structured
- great interest but also knowledge concerning nutritional issues

process of change

- everyday life changes already in anticipation of life events by
 - ... preparation activities that 'pre-structure' later consumption patterns (e.g. purchase of freezer)
 - ... increasing the attentiveness towards relevant information concerning new roles and demands, new life contexts etc.
- these information are communicated and appropriated as 'bundles' of space-and-time-bound activities, motives, meaning, etc.

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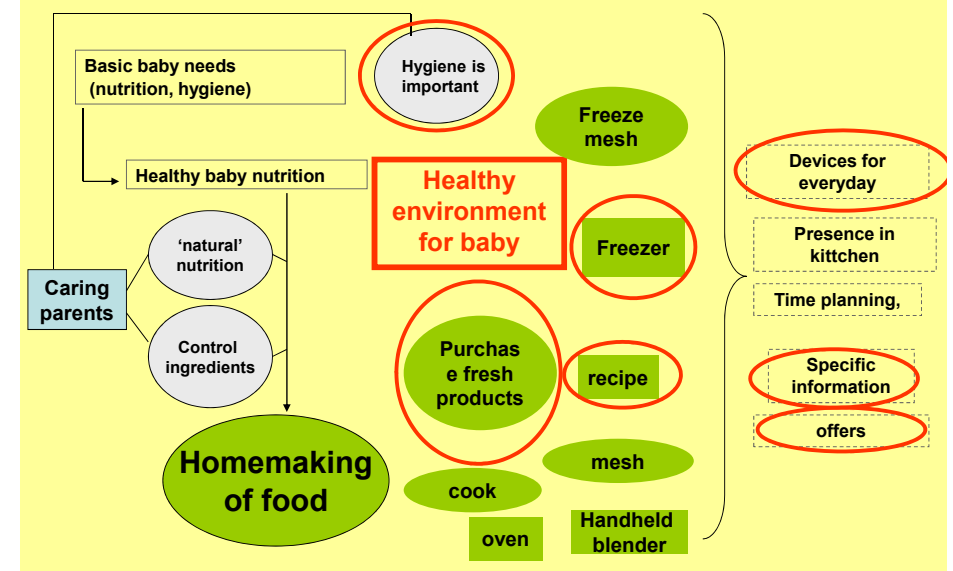


social practices and the transition of everyday consumption

- SOCIAL PRACTICES are prefiguring as well as supporting the transition to a new biographic phase giving practical orientation ('what to do') and social orientation ('how to be')
- consumption can be seen as a materializing part of the transition process that
 - ... serves as 'something familiar in the unknown' (e.g. 'family dinner')
 - ... carries and 'visualizes' meaning (e.g. 'buying organic baby food')
 - ... makes changes palpable (e.g. 'alternative cooking practices')
 - ... keeps busy and allows to 'try out' the new situation/ roles/ belongings (e.g. 'visiting family cafés')

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Example: homemaking baby food





the role of the campaign

- often poorly remembered
- one of many sources for information and orientation
- no motivation to change newly established routines
- campaign worked, if 'starting points' were found in everyday life of people, which was independent from life phase they are in

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the role of sustainability

- consideration of social practices seems to be fruitful for an understanding of consumption as well as changes in consumption through life events
 - makes the embedment of consumption activities in the social arena as well as its connection to space, artefacts and temporal structures visible
 - makes visible where single consumption activities belong to and how they are meshed with other activities, ends, meanings, social relations etc.

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the role of sustainability

- there is a phase around life events where people are changing consumption patterns, but changes are more influenced by 'significant others'/ relevant social sites transmitting appropriate social practices and by available systems of provision; a transformation towards SC is mostly an 'unintended effect' often compensated by developments in the opposite directions
- there is no 'general break' in routines but specific moments of de-routinization in an on-going transformation process: sustainability campaigns or interventions need to go where new knowledge is acquired/ new practices are learnt and need to consider the embedment of SP

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